Ja 143 — Virocana Jātaka

English translation by Robert Chalmers.

Source: https://raw.githubusercontent.com/suttacentral/sc-data/2d9ca8da858f94302ed6783e2717bf73d651881b/html_text/en/pli/sutta/kn/ja/vol1/ja143.html

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Edited by E. B. Cowell

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Pinned source revision: https://github.com/suttacentral/sc-data/commit/2d9ca8da858f94302ed6783e2717bf73d651881b

Scope: Complete numbered source article from the traditional Jātaka commentary; canonical verses appear in story context. This is not a verse-only edition.

Changes: Converted the pinned SuttaCentral HTML article to plain text; removed inline print page-reference labels and normalized whitespace. The original source retains references.

Text

“Your mangled corpse.”—This story was told by the Master while at the Bamboo-grove, about Devadatta’s efforts to pose as a Buddha at Gayasisa. For when his spiritual Insight left him and he lost the honour and profit which once were his, he in his perplexity asked the Master to concede the Five Points. This being refused, he made a schism in the Brotherhood and departed to Gayasisa with five hundred young Brethren, pupils of the Buddha’s two chief disciples, but as yet unversed in the Law and the Rule. With this following he performed the acts of a separate Brotherhood gathered together within the same precincts. Knowing well the time when the knowledge of these young Brethren should ripen, the Master sent the two Elders to them. Seeing these, Devadatta joyfully set to work expounding far into the night with (as he flattered himself) the masterly power of a Buddha. Then posing as a Buddha he said, “The assembly, reverend Sariputta, is still alert and sleepless. Will you be so good as to think of some religious discourse to address to the Brethren? My back is aching with my labours, and I must rest it awhile.” So saying he went away to lie down. Then those two chief disciples taught the Brethren, enlightening them as to the Fruitions and the Paths, till in the end they won them all over to go back to the Bamboo-grove.

Finding the Monastery emptied of the Brethren, Kokalika went to Devadatta and told him how the two disciples had broken up his following and left the Monastery empty; “and yet here you still lie asleep,” said he. So saying he stripped off Devadatta’s outer cloth and kicked him on the chest with as little compunction as if he were knocking a roof-peg into a mud-wall. The blood gushed out of Devadatta’s mouth, and ever after he suffered from the effects of the blow.

Said the Master to Sariputta, “What was Devadatta doing when you got there?” And Sariputta answered that, though posing as a Buddha, evil had befallen him. Said the Master, “Even as now, Sariputta, so in former times too has Devadatta imitated me to his own hurt.” Then, at the Elder’s request, he told this story of the past.

Once on a time when Brahmadatta was reigning in Benares, the Bodhisatta was a maned lion and dwelt at Gold Den in the Himalayas. Bounding forth one day from his lair, he looked North and West, South and East, and roared aloud as he went in quest of prey. Slaying a large buffalo, he devoured the prime of the carcass, after which he went down to a pool, and having drunk his fill of crystal water turned to go towards his den. Now a hungry jackal, suddenly meeting the lion, and being unable to make his escape, threw himself at the lion's feet. Being asked what he wanted, the jackal replied, "Lord, let me be thy servant." "Very well," said the lion; "serve me and you shall feed on prime meat." So saying, he went with the jackal following to Gold Den. Thenceforth the lion's leavings fell to the jackal, and he grew fat.

Lying one day in his den, the lion told the jackal to scan the valleys from the mountain top, to see whether there were any elephants or horses or buffalos about, or any other animals of which he, the jackal, was fond. If any such were in sight, the jackal was to report and say with due obeisance, "Shine forth in thy might, Lord." Then the lion promised to kill and eat, giving a part to the jackal. So the jackal used to climb the heights, and whenever he espied below beasts to his taste, he would report it to the lion, and falling at his feet, say, "Shine forth in thy might, Lord." Hereon the lion would nimbly bound forth and slay the beast, even if it were a rutting elephant, and share the prime of the carcass with the jackal. Glutted with his meal, the jackal would then retire to his den and sleep.

Now as time went on, the jackal grew bigger and bigger till be grew haughty. "Have not I too four legs?" he asked himself. "Why am I a pensioner day by day on others' bounty? Henceforth I will kill elephants and other beasts, for my own eating. The lion, king of beasts, only kills them because of the formula, 'Shine forth in thy might, Lord.' I'll make the lion call out to me, 'Shine forth in thy might, jackal,' and then I'll kill an elephant for myself." Accordingly he went to the lion, and pointing out that he had long lived on what the lion had killed, told his desire to eat an elephant of his own killing, ending with a request to the lion to let him, the jackal, couch in the lion's corner in Gold Den whilst the lion was to climb the mountain to look out for an elephant. The quarry found, he asked that the lion should come to him in the den and say, 'Shine forth in thy might, jackal.' He begged the lion not to grudge him this much. Said the lion, "Jackal, only lions can kill elephants, nor has the world ever seen a jackal able to cope with them. Give up this fancy, and continue to feed on what I kill." But say what the lion could, the jackal would not give way, and still pressed his request. So at last the lion gave way, and bidding the jackal couch in the den, climbed the peak and thence espied an elephant in rut. Returning to the mouth of the cave, he said, "Shine forth in thy might, jackal." Then from Gold Den the jackal nimbly bounded forth, looked around him on all four sides, and, thrice raising its howl, sprang at the elephant, meaning to fasten on its bead. But missing his aim, he alighted at the elephant's feet. The infuriated brute raised its right foot and crushed the jackal's head, trampling the bones into powder. Then pounding the carcass into a mass, and dunging upon it, the elephant dashed trumpeting into the forest. Seeing all this, the Bodhisatta observed, "Now shine forth in thy might, jackal," and uttered this stanza—

Your mangled corpse, your brains mashed into clay,

Prove how you've shone forth in your might to-day.

Thus spake the Bodhisatta, and living to a good old age he passed away in the fulness of time to fare according to his deserts.

His lesson ended, the Master identified the Birth by saying, "Devadatta was the jackal of those days, and I the lion."

The Jātaka, or Stories of the Buddha's Former Births, edited by E.B. Cowell, published by The Cambridge University Press.

Vol. 1, translated by Robert Chalmers, 1895.

Vol. 2, translated by W.H.D. Rouse, 1895.

Vol. 3, translated by H.T. Francis and R.A. Neil, 1897.

Vol. 4, translated by W.H.D. Rouse, 1901.

Vol. 5, translated by H.T. Francis, 1905.

Vol. 6, translated by E.B. Cowell and W.H.D. Rouse, 1907.

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